

### *International Education: The Basque Land*

The Idaho State Department of Education is dedicated to increasing the technical capability, social readiness, and global perspective of high school graduates in order that they will complete school with the character, skills, and knowledge to become responsible and productive citizens in their community, state, nation and world. The following lesson on the Basque Country integrates one of Clifton Taulbert's *Eight Habits of the Heart* "to incite your memory and passion so that you can employ your imagination in the building of good communities for the twenty-first century."

Taulbert, Clifton. (1997). *Eight Habits of the Heart*. New York, New York: Penguin Books.

Invaded and attacked throughout the ages, the Basque Country has prevailed and remains today a proud country that looks to the future with **hope** for its existence. The Basque culture has remained strong, thanks in part to the fact that the Basques practice **hope, one of the habits author Clifton Taulbert discusses in Eight Habits of the Heart**. The Basque Country, or Euskal Herria, is not an official country with its own autonomy, but it is an unofficial country a little smaller than the state of New Hampshire, with a language unrelated to any other and a people whose origins are entirely unknown. For these reasons and because Idaho has one of the largest populations of Basque people outside Euskal Herria, it is fitting that students study Basque land. Furthermore, few people realize the contributions Basques have made to the world, including their **powerful example of ways that hope can help build a strong culture**. The following lesson and suggested extension activities will promote an understanding of the Basque Country, its contributions to the world, and **the part that hope has played in its longevity and its prospects for the future**.

*Within the community, hope is believing in tomorrow –  
because you have learned to see with your heart. Talbert, p. 89*

Approximately 120 minutes will be required to complete the story and activities.

#### **I. Content:**

I want my students to understand (or be able to):

- A. Recognize some of the contributions the Basque people have made to the world.
- B. Recognize some of the struggles the Basque people have endured throughout history, including the devastation and suffering experienced by the Basque people with the bombing of Gernika.
- C. **Analyze how hope has helped to sustain the Basque culture.**
- D. Identify the main ideas or essential messages within the short story, "An Acorn in Gernika."
- E. Analyze the character traits of Antoni and Uncle Marzelo, the main characters in "An Acorn in Gernika."

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- F. Identify and analyze the symbolism behind the eagle and the swastika, and behind the light left burning by Uncle Marzelo, the lauburu, and the great oak, the Tree of Gernika.

#### **II. Prerequisites:**

To fully appreciate this lesson, the student must have basic understanding of:

- A. Determining the main ideas or essential messages within a text.
- B. Analyzing narrative literature according to the text elements of mood, character, setting, conflict, plot structure, theme, symbolism, and point of view.

#### **III. Instructional Objectives:**

The students will:

- A. On a map of Euskadi, the Basque Country, locate the three Basque Provinces in France: Labourd, Basse Navarre, and Soule. Locate the four Basque Provinces in Spain: Guipuzcoa, Alava, Navarra, and Viscaya. Locate Gernika in the province of Viscaya.
- B. Take notes about the Basque Country.
- C. Read “An Acorn in Gernika,” by Christine Echeverria Bender.
- D. Develop a plot curve/diagram with details from the story.
- E. Each team creates a found poem using words and phrases from the story. According to Wikipedia Online Encyclopedia, “Found Poetry is the rearrangement of words or phrases that are taken randomly from other sources (example: clipped newspaper headlines, bits of advertising copy, handwritten cards pulled from a hat) in a manner that gives the rearranged words a completely new meaning.”

#### **IV. Materials and Equipment:**

*Teacher:* Overhead projector

Map transparencies:

World Map

Map of Basque Provinces—**Student Handout #1**

Handout: “Notes on the Basque Country”—**Student Handout #2**

*Students:* Paper for note-taking

Assigned partners/teams/groups

Copies of the following:

Handouts: “Notes on the Basque Country”—**Student Handout #2**

“An Acorn in Gernika”—**Student Handout #3**

Two or more overhead transparencies and a Vis a Vis pen or butcher paper and a marker for each team

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**V. Instructional Procedures:**

This lesson is designed to be integrated into a unit on multicultural or world literature.

- A. Students take notes from **Notes on the Basque Country—Student Handout #2**
- B. Read aloud together “An Acorn in Gernika,” by Christine Echeverria Bender—**Student Handout #3**
- C. As a class or in teams, students will each write the main events of the story on a plot curve/diagram and then discuss the events. See plot diagrams: <http://www.thinkport.org/Tools/ContentViewer/ContentPreview.aspx?ContentID=720f7fd1-95fb-4240-a945-2146c981ac46>  
<http://teacher.scholastic.com/lessonplans/graphicorg/pdfs/plotdiagram.pdf>  
[http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson\\_images/lesson800/IdentifyPlot.pdf](http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson800/IdentifyPlot.pdf),  
or go to:  
<http://www.readwritethink.org/materials/plot-diagram/>  
for an excellent interactive activity that allows the user to create a plot diagram for this story.
- D. In teams, students will each use a highlighter to highlight important words and phrases in the story, especially those suggesting mood or theme or illustrating symbolism or point of view, with special attention to **any words or phrases reflecting the habit of hope--the things such as family, the light left burning, the lauburu, and the great oak, all which give Antoni and his family hope for the future.**
- E. Next the class will discuss mood, theme, symbolism, and point of view in the story--especially any **examples of the habit of hope**. For example, Antoni and his immediate family flee to Uncle Marzelo in **hope**, and Marzelo, who finds **hope** and strength in prayer and the light left burning, comforts Antoni with the promise that there is **hope** as long as there is one acorn in Gernika. Antoni finds **hope** in his pledge to defend his father's house. Uncle Marzelo encourages Antoni to give up the gun if there is to be any **hope** of keeping the family safe, and Antoni finds **hope** and strength when Marzelo tells Antoni that his father would be proud of his son.
- F. From their highlighted sections, each team will work together to compose a found poem that reflects as many of the following elements in this story as possible: mood, character, setting, conflict, theme, symbolism, and point of view. Each poem should be 15-20 lines or more and include **examples of the habit of hope contained in the story**. A scribe for each team will write the poem on butcher paper or on an overhead transparency. One or more persons will display the poem and read it aloud to the class.

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**VI. Assessment/Evaluation:**

Upon completion of this lesson, students should be demonstrating success in identifying the elements of mood, character, setting, conflict, plot structure, theme, symbolism, and point of view. Students should be able to discuss knowledge of the Basque Country and **some ways that the habit of hope has helped build a strong Basque culture.**

**VII. Idaho Achievement Standards:**

Standard 2: Comprehension/Interpretation

**Goal 2.3: Acquire Skills for Comprehending Literary Text**

7.LA.2.3.1 Read and respond to literature from a variety of genres, including poetry

7.LA.2.3.2 Analyze characterization as shown through a character's thoughts, words, speech patterns, and actions; the narrator's description; and the thoughts, words, and actions of other characters.

7.LA.2.3.4 Analyze plot development, including types of conflict

7.LA.2.3.5 Recognize points of view

7.LA.2.3.6 Analyze the themes of various genres

Standard 4: Writing Applications

**Goal 4.1: Acquire Expressive (Narrative/Creative) Writing Skills**

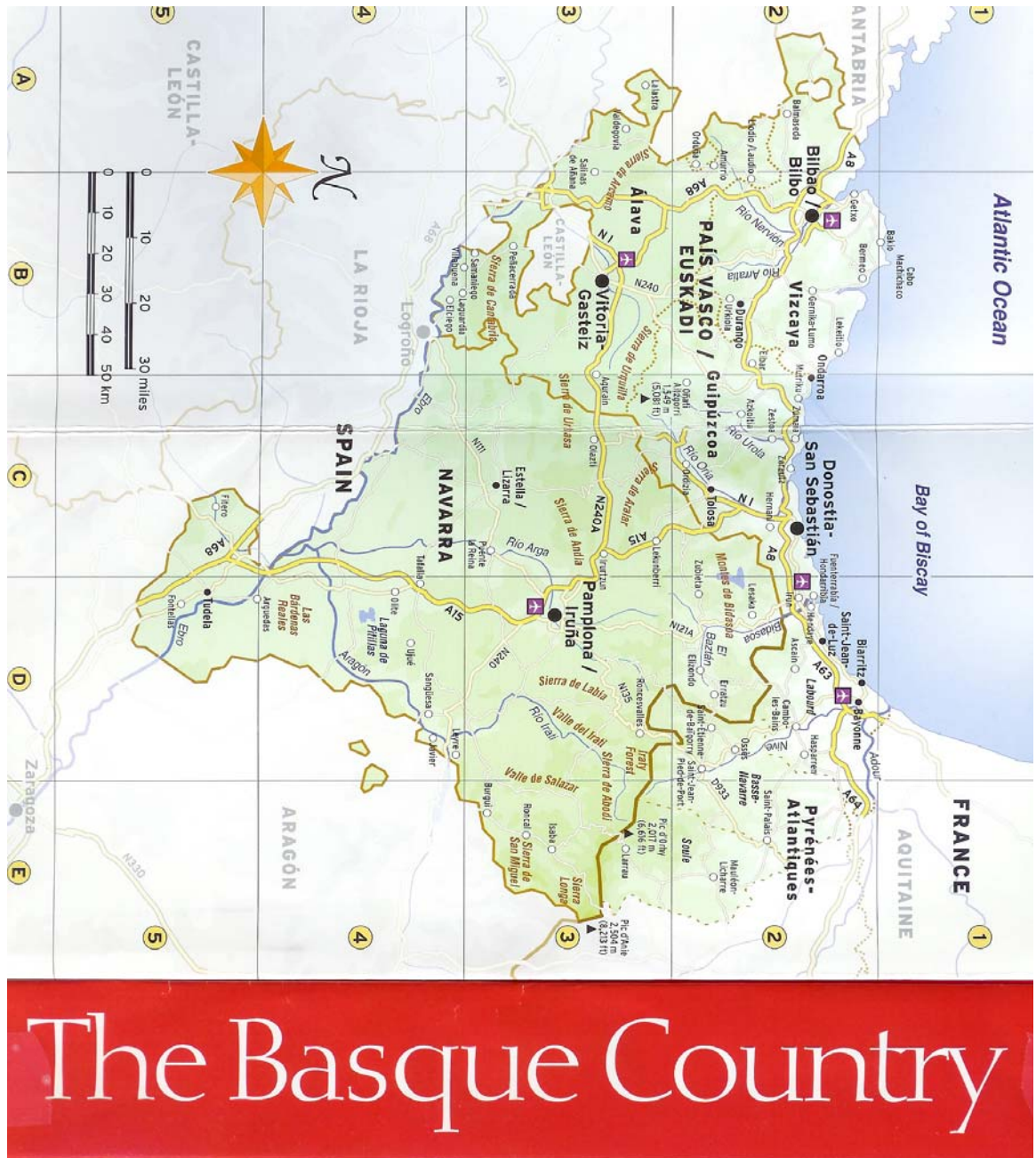
7.LA.4.1.2 Create original works that include descriptive strategies and figurative language

Standard 6: Communication

**Goal 6.2: Acquire Speaking Skills**

7.LA.6.2.4 Deliver narrative presentations that include sensory details and establish a context, plot, and point of view.

**VIII. Follow-up Activities:** See Extension Activities—**Teacher Handout #1 and Teacher Handout #2**

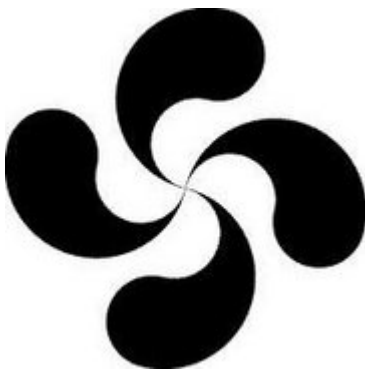


From The Basque Country, a Hachette Travel Guide

## Notes on the Basque Country

- The Basque Country is not an official country with its own autonomy, but an unofficial country a little smaller than the state of New Hampshire, with a language unrelated to any other, and a people whose origins are entirely unknown. "... Basques are often thought to be direct descendants of this man (Cro-Magnon) who lived 40,000 years ago." John Adams wrote, "...this extraordinary people have preserved their ancient language, genius, laws, government and manners without innovation, longer than any other nation of Europe." (The Basque History of the World by Mark Kurlansky)
- Few people realize the contributions Basques have made to the world. Very early on, they were pathfinders who led the way in many areas. They were among the first explorers and capitalists, and they introduced cod, corn, and other products to Europe and other parts of the world. Great fishermen, "they were the first people to hunt whales for profit." In ships they had learned to build from the Vikings, they "traveled far north for whales, and by about 1400, they found the crowded schools of cod on the coast of North America where the Vikings had fished...." (The Cod's Tale by Mark Kurlansky)
- They were leading shipbuilders, pilots, and navigators. The *Santa Maria* was probably built by Basques. With several Basques among his crew, Christopher Columbus made his voyages guided by fishing charts that belonged to a family of Basque fishermen.
- Most people would say that Magellan was the first person to circumnavigate the globe, but this is not true. Magellan was in command of five ships set to circle the globe, but he "was killed on his voyage by tribesmen in the Phillipines." Juan Sebastian de Elcano, a Basque commander of one of Magellan's five ships, took command of Magellan's ship and completed the voyage, thus becoming the first man to circumnavigate the globe. (The Basque History of the World by Mark Kurlansky)
- Basques have been leading industrialists and manufacturers, and the Basque Country was once a shipbuilding capital of the world and one of the world's largest steelmakers.
- Basque people show **great hope** for the survival of their culture as they continue to be very nationalistic, very devoted to their country, and very devoted to family and to the house of their father. They preserve almost everything and hold very strongly to their rural roots, but at the same time, they are open to change and want to be part of the modern world.

- Basque history is filled with stories of invasions and struggles for existence. The Basques have been persecuted, often merely for being Basque, but they continue to hope for peace and for the right to live as Basques. For centuries, they maintained their identity against Visigoths, Vikings, Roman invaders, and many others. During the Spanish Civil War, Basques struggled against Spain itself and even against one another for the right to existence. Under the rule of Fascist General Francisco Franco, they were not allowed to speak their language and were often tortured or even executed for speaking Basque. Franco, along with Germany's Adolph Hitler, worked to annihilate the Basques, and the attack on Gernika on April 26, 1937, is just one example of the torture and devastation the Basques have withstood. Guernica, a painting by Pablo Picasso, commemorates the horrors and complete devastation caused on market day by the aerial bombing and attack of Gernika by German and some Italian planes. Franco denied that he had any part in this attack, but the world now knows that he had asked the Germans for help in overturning the Spanish Republican government. Picasso's painting has played an important part in letting the world know what happened in Gernika on that day. ("Gernika" is the Basque spelling; "Guernica" is the Spanish spelling.) See Guernica: <http://www.mala.bc.ca/~lanes/english/hemngway/picasso/guernica.htm>)



The **lauburu** or **Basque cross** has four comma-shaped heads, each of which is drawn with a compass upon a scribed cross, employing in each head a common center but two settings, one the half of the other. Some historians and authorities say it signifies the "four heads or regions" of the Basque Country even though there are in fact seven, not four. The lauburu does not appear in any of the seven

coats-of-arms that have been combined in the arms of the Basque Country: [Navarra](#), [Guipuzcoa](#), [Bizkaia](#), [Alava](#), [Labourd](#), [La Soule](#) The Basque intellectual Imanol Mujica liked to say that the heads signify spirit, life, consciousness, and form but it is generally used as a symbol of prosperity. Many Basque homes and shops display the symbol over the doorway as a sort of [talisman](#). In modern times it has been associated with the [swastika](#). The symbol in its positive form (right-facing) can symbolize life, and in its negative form (left-facing) death. This is the reason why many Basque tombstones display left-facing lauburus.

This entry is from Wikipedia, the leading user-contributed encyclopedia.

The Tree of Gernika is also referred to as “the Great Oak” and bears acorns.

[http://www.jjggbizkaia.net/english/casa\\_juntas/arbol\\_gernika.asp](http://www.jjggbizkaia.net/english/casa_juntas/arbol_gernika.asp)

### **The Tree of Gernika**

The Tree of Gernika is, without any doubt, the most universal symbol of all Basque people.

The tree that provided shelter or shade for the early Assemblies of the Seignior of Biscay has become, in time, the symbol of the permanence of a nation and its institutions against the historical ups and downs that the Basques have experienced in their existence as a community.

The Tree of Gernika has spread beyond the geographical limits of Biscay to become a reference point for the whole of Euskalherria.

As a symbol that links our past and our present, it currently witnesses such special events as the taking possession and swearing into office of the Lehendakari (President of the Basque Country) or the Diputado General (Prime Minister of the Territory).

A commemorative plaque remembers the words used in 1936 by José Antonio Aguirre, the first Lehendakari of Euskadi, which have become the protocol formula for carrying out this swearing into office.

*Humbled before God  
on foot on Basque soil  
in memory of our ancestors  
under the tree of Gernika  
before you  
representatives of the people  
I swear to faithfully carry out my  
duties.*





Though not the first of the Trees of Gernika, the trunk of the "Old Tree", which stands in the garden of the Casa de Juntas (Assembly House), is the remains of the oldest preserved tree.



The successor to the "Old Tree" was planted in 1860 and remained outside the entrance to the oath-taking tribune until 2004, the year in which its life cycle ended and it had to be substituted.



Since 25<sup>th</sup> February 2005, the date on which it was planted, a new Tree of Gernika lends continuity to the historical tradition.



The Tree of Gernika has conserved the antiquity that makes its lords famous, without tyrants having stripped it, nor its having given shade to converts nor to traitors

Tirso de Molina

The Tree of Gernika is the central symbol of the coat of arms of Biscay.

### GERNIKAKO ARBOLA

J.M. Iparagirre reflects the importance of this symbol in his song "Gernikako Arbola":

Gernikako Arbola  
da bedeinkatua  
euskaldunen artean  
guztiz maitatua.  
Eman ta zabal zazu  
munduan frutua  
adoratzen zaitugu  
arbola santua. (...)

O tree of our Guernica  
O symbol blessed by God  
Held dear by all euskaldunak  
By them revered and loved.  
Ancient and holy symbol  
Let fall thy fruit worldwide  
While we in adoration gaze  
On thee our blessed tree.

1999-2005. Bizkaiko Batzar Nagusiak – Juntas Generales de Bizkaia. <http://www.jjggbizkaia>

### *An Acorn In Gernika*

*Printed with permission from author Christine Echeverria Bender, an American Basque who resides in Boise Idaho.*

The rifle in my bandaged hand grew heavier as we trudged behind our ox hauling the two-wheeled cart that cradled my father's body. My mother had wrapped Father in a gray blanket, covered the gray blanket with a brown one, and then packed our belongings around him. We held tightly to the sides of the cart to keep its rocking from betraying us, and to keep the blankets from working loose and exposing Father's lifeless face to the night. Nothing but the stars and a sliver of the moon lit our way.

The smell of smoke and death trailed us as we climbed. After the first hour of walking and pushing I stopped looking into the cart. After four hours my older sister stopped weeping. Every few moments I could feel the touch of my mother's stricken glance.

Our old ox needed the help of all three of us to lumber up the last hill. When the ground leveled out at last and we found my great-uncle's house still standing, we halted and stared at the light shining from his kitchen window as if its glow revealed a miracle. At Mother's call Uncle Marzelo opened the door with an injured lamb in his arms. "Tomas!" he cried, running to my mother and pulling her to his chest against the lamb. Mother weakened then, and he had to drop the lamb to keep her from falling.

"Francisca," he called to my sister, who was already hurrying over to help Mother into the house. But before they had cleared the doorway my mother jerked to a stop and pushed Uncle Marzelo toward me, shouting, "Watch over Antoni, Uncle! Watch over him!"

Uncle Marzelo turned back, drew me close, and lifted my face with one leathery hand. His eyes lingered on my bruised cheek, the broken right lens of my glasses, my bandaged hand still gripping the rifle. He studied my expressionless gaze then let his hand fall away, and scanned the dark hilltop. When his pain-darkened eyes met mine again, he asked in a voice as deep and dry as an empty well, "Is it just the three of you, then?"

"Yes, Uncle." My tone was peculiarly calm.

"Your father?"

I pointed at the cart. We plodded toward it and lowered our eyes to the rounded blanket tucked between the chests and baskets. The stench rose like steam. Uncle Marzelo grabbed me, holding me so tightly that my sore face throbbed against his chest. His fingers dug into my jacket as he choked out, "Aunt Benita, Aunt Aitana? Their families?"

Hours earlier my mind had shrouded what I had seen lying amid the rubble, but I said, "They were caught inside their homes when the bombs started falling. They were burned, Uncle."

A spasm shook him fiercely. My arms reached no higher than his belt, but I tried to steady him. Clumsy because of the rifle I clasped, we slid to the ground.

"How many? How many are dead, Antoni?"

"Half the town, maybe. The square is nothing but stones and blood."

He bowed his head and his shoulders began to tremble. A growling grew deep in his chest as tears spilled and then flowed.

I did not respond, and it was my strange silence, my statue-like stillness that eventually reached him and slowly brought his head up. He wiped at his eyes and nose. “Talk to me, Antoni.” When I said nothing, he repeated with greater authority and deeper concern, “Talk to me.”

I said only, “Today was market day. They knew when to come, when they would kill the most people.”

“Yes,” he said, his haggard face bitter, “they knew. And they knew we had no defense against airplanes and bombs.” He took a shaky breath and nodded for me to continue.

“They bombed the buildings and the houses, missing ours. Then they dropped a liquid that burned everything it touched. For three hours the planes came, exploding and burning. After that, the soldiers marched in with machineguns. People tried to leave the city, but many were shot down. We waited.”

Uncle Marzelo held his eyes shut, his mouth pinched. When he could speak, he said, “I tried to come to you. The planes kept flying over. Some fired at me and I had to turn back. All night I left my light burning, praying you would reach me.”

In the long hush that followed, I thought of those who would never reach him again. His attention gradually resettled on the rifle in my hands. “Let me see that, Antoni.”

Without releasing my grip, I held the rifle out to him.

“Where did you get this?”

I gave no answer.

He tried to ease the gun from my grasp but I yanked it back, surprising him greatly. His words sharpened. “Tell me where you got it.”

My mind went unwilling back, and froze. Trapped by an instant in time, I again felt the rifle buck against my shoulder, heard a single shot ring out.

Uncle Marzelo said, “That’s a Nazi rifle. Where did you find it?”

“Find it? No, Father found it. I killed with it.”

“Dear God!”

The words rolled out like uneven pebbles. “After the bombing stopped, Father left us and came back with this rifle. We kept praying the soldiers wouldn’t bother with so small a farm on the edge of town. When it started getting dark and we packed up to leave, Father hid the rifle under a blanket in the cart. We were just ready to go when one of Franco’s soldiers came up behind Father and told him not to move. The soldier looked us all over and went to Francisca. He raised his hand to touch her cheek, and Father lunged at him. The soldier spun around and fired his gun, and Father fell. I was close to the cart. I pulled out the rifle. I killed the soldier as he crouched over Father’s body.”

I added with finality, clenching the rifle, “It’s mine now.”

“Not yet eleven years old,” Uncle Marzelo groaned.

My mouth hardened. “Old enough.”

He shook his head. “And your face, your hand?”

“The rifle knocked me against the cart. When I fell, my face hit Mother’s soup kettle. I cut my hand helping pack the knives.”

Taking care not to touch the rifle, he lifted me to my feet and we shuffled toward the house. “You must eat something, and sleep,” he said. “Then we must bury your father.”

When Uncle Marzelo shook me awake a few hours later, daylight had already reached my sleeping corner and its brightness stung my eyes. Before I had allowed myself to fall asleep, I had wrapped the rifle’s strap around my right arm. Now, I unwound the strap and slipped it over my head and one shoulder as I followed my uncle to the table.

Mother stared out of swollen eyes at me and my rifle then placed plates of bread and cheese on the table. We sat down without speaking and I ate without tasting.

After leaving the table, Uncle Marzelo and I found a shady patch behind his house and began to dig Father’s grave. With each scoop and heave of the shovel, the rifle bumped against my back. Uncle Marzelo paused often to listen and to scan the skies, but there was no sign of planes.

When the hole was deep enough we climbed out and rested in our sweaty clothes. Lying on my back I held the rifle across my chest.

“Antoni,” my uncle said gently, “sit up and look at me.” When I had, he went on, “You must give up that rifle.”

My hands and jaws tightened.

“If the soldiers come and find you with it, they will shoot you.”

“I will defend this house, this family.”

“What chance will you have against so many? You saw how they destroyed Gernika. Your mother could not bear to lose you. She’s already lost a good husband and two sisters.”

I ran my hand over the rifle’s wooden stock and up its barrel, where my fingers slowed to trace the grooves that formed the image of an eagle.

Seeing this, Uncle Marzelo’s face grew scornful. “A Nazi eagle, Hitler’s mark. Hitler supplied Franco’s rebels with thousands of rifles just like that one.”

“Hitler? The German?”

“Those were not Franco’s planes that bombed Gernika, Antoni. They were Hitler’s. Franco sold his soul to the devil, sold it for rifles and planes.”

“But the planes had a different mark. It looked almost like a lauburu.”

“Hitler took *our* symbol, *ours*, and sharpened the curves into corners; then he claimed it for his army. Their new emblem is evil, just as the eagle on that rifle is evil.” He stood and held out his hand. “Give it to me, Antoni. We will bury it beneath your father. You killed with it to save your mother and Francisca, as your father would have done. Now his grave will hide it, to keep us safe if the soldiers come.”

I looked away from his outstretched hand.

He reached down and took hold of the barrel.

I leaped up, clamping both hands around the rifle and struggling to wrench it from him.

“Antoni!” he shouted as he wrapped his other hand around the gun.

Lurching, yanking, pushing, I struggled to free the rifle, but old and thin as Uncle Marzelo was he did not let go. The barrel of the rifle swung around and struck his head, knocking off his beret, and yet he clung to the weapon. We fought for control, our feet skidding in the pile of loose dirt, and in one overpowering heave I shoved my great-uncle

onto his back against the pile. He pulled the rifle down with him and I fell onto his chest, crushing the breath from his lungs. His hands loosened just enough for me to twist the rifle free.

I stood over him, panting, more stunned than he, then I fell to my knees and rocked back and forth with the rifle locked in my embrace. “Oh, Uncle...you mustn’t take it, Uncle. It’s all I have. All that’s left.”

He came nearer and sat by me in silence. Finally, he said, “No, not all that’s left.”

“But you don’t know, you haven’t seen. Even the oak. They’ve even killed the great oak.”

He tried to mask his own pain at this revelation, and gathered himself quickly. “What has the oak always represented, Antoni?”

At our failure, our ruin, I could no longer withhold my tears. I released a sob and heard my own words mock me. “The Basque people...and our strength...strength to stand against all that befalls us.”

He gave me a moment. “My boy, was this a lie? Was the oak a *false* symbol?”

I quieted my weeping and looked at him in confusion. His face bore an undeniable, resolute strength. And pride, even that. I heard myself answer, “No.”

“In all of Gernika can you find a single acorn?”

I thought back, remembering the devastation, but I nodded.

“Then our oak tree will grow again, Antoni.” He held my gaze, speaking of more than a tree.

Rising shakily to his feet, he dusted the dirt from his pants and stepped to the edge of the grave. I joined him there. He waited until I lifted the rifle, which grew unspeakably ugly in my hand, and I tossed it into the oblong pit. It landed with a dull thud, the etching of the eagle hidden in the loose dirt, already buried.

I looked up at Uncle Marzelo, searching. “You don’t think Father will mind?”

“It is a sign of his son’s courage. He will not mind such company.”

He laid a heavy arm around my shoulders and we turned toward the cart. After a few steps, I paused to pick up his black beret. I brushed it off carefully and held it out to him.

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Question for discussion:

We know that “the great oak” and the Assembly House survived the attack on April 26, 1937. Discuss why the author has Antoni say, “They’ve even killed the great oak.”

The author’s explanation follows in her own words:

“Although *the* oak tree of Gernika may not have been immediately killed by the bombing, I used a little license here since Antoni saw the town square and, stunned and terrified, looked up toward the Parliament building through smoke and tears. In his fear and desolation, he *believed* the tree had been killed by the bombs....The symbolism of the oak, its destruction and rebirth, gained strength by eliminating the time lapse, so I gave Antoni (and his listeners) this perception.”

## Extension Activities

The following activities are suggestions for expanding the lesson, reinforcing the Idaho Achievement Standards, and providing opportunities for differentiated learning. The options for use could include required assignments, extra credit assignments, written reports, oral presentations, and individual or group work. Students should be organized in groups or teams for many of these activities

Suggested homework activity to follow “An Acorn in Gernika”. Each student will have a choice of one of the following culminating activities:

1. Rewrite or type his or her team’s poem to be displayed on poster paper and then illustrate the poem to reflect three or more of the following elements from the story: mood, character, setting, conflict, plot structure, theme, symbolism, and point of view.
2. Create a new poem based on the story from the point of view of one of the characters in the story or a poem with one part from one character’s point of view and a second part from another character’s point of view. The poem should be 15-20 lines or longer and **incorporate in some way the part that hope plays in this story.**
3. Write a letter to author Christine Echeverria Bender and send it via e-mail ([www.christinebender.com](http://www.christinebender.com)). The letter should include the student’s reactions to the story with feedback about the author’s style and the story’s content. The letter should also include any questions the reader has about the events in the story or about the way that the author conducted research for this story. Include the teacher’s e-mail address on the same line as the author’s e-mail address so that the message is mailed to both author and teacher at the same time.
4. Illustrate a scene or scenes from the story or from “Notes on the Basque Country.” Include something in the illustration that depicts **what gives hope to Antoni and his family and/or to the Basque Country.**
5. Conduct research on the Internet to locate and print information about the Tree of Gernika, the bombing of Gernika, or Guernica, Pablo Picasso’s famous painting. Create a summary, a poem, or song lyrics from this information, or copy Picasso’s style to create a student-drawn or student-painted copy of Guernica. In some way, illustrate or explain how the item or event is part of how the Basque people practice the **habit of hope**. Submit the created piece on top of the research material printed from the Internet

<http://www.mala.bc.ca/~lanes/english/hemngway/picasso/guernica.htm>  
<http://www.gernikagogoratuz.org/articulo1juangutierrezg.html>  
[http://www.jjgbizkaia.net/english/casa\\_juntas/arbol\\_gernika.asp](http://www.jjgbizkaia.net/english/casa_juntas/arbol_gernika.asp)

## Other activities that show how hope builds strength in the Basque people:

6. Have the class read aloud “Olentzeroa: The Basque Santa Claus” from the student handout found at <http://www.basqueclubs.com/Pages/olentzero.htm#kids>. Discuss the theme of **hope** as it is illustrated by this story. What gives Olentzeroa **hope** to carry on when living alone makes him sad? (He realizes that he can help other people who need his help and do things for others to make them happy.) Discuss how this lesson might also give us **hope**. Develop a **service-learning project** and do something to **help others and give them hope**. How might the saying at the end of the story give **hope** to the Basque people and even to us? How, then, might the Basques find **hope** in something that has a name? For example, how might they find **hope** in naming their land Euskadi, the Basque Country? Stories have been passed down orally through the ages and are a very important way of passing on the culture from one generation of Basques to another. How do we see this evidence of **hope for the Basque culture** in this story?
7. For a lesson on idioms, print proverbs from <http://www.buber.net/Basque/Euskara/proverb.html>. Select sayings that might offer **hope** to the Basque people. Begin by reading some of the proverbs aloud as a class and discussing the possible meanings, then reading the interpretation from the website. Read a new proverb and instruct students to write their explanations and then teams discuss various interpretations. Next have volunteers share interpretations with the class. Finally, share with the class the interpretation listed on the website. Repeat this process one or more times. To continue, instruct teams to work together to discuss and interpret as many of the proverbs as time allows and then share again as a class or have students refer to interpretations from the website given to them on a handout or presented on an overhead transparency.
8. For students and teachers who would like to read more literature about the Basques written by Christine Echeverria Bender, check out two of her recently published historical novels. Challenge the Wind is about Domingo, a young Basque man who ends up living his dream of going to sea when his father sends him on a voyage with Christopher Columbus. For years, members of Domingo’s family have passed down their charts of the North Atlantic fishing grounds which they have kept secret, but the charts have fallen into the hands of Columbus, who is using them to guide his exploration. Sails of Fortune tells about the lives of Ferdinand Magellan, the man most people credit as the one who circumnavigated the globe, and Juan Sebastian de Elcano, the Basque sailor who in fact accomplishes this feat after Magellan is killed and Elcano takes command of the voyage. Meet at lunch or after to school in a book circle to discuss the books or write to Echeverria Bender to discuss the works. See her website for more information and an e-mail address:  
<http://www.christinebender.com/pages/3/index.htm>.

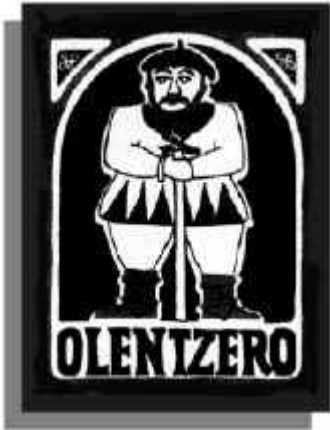


## OLENTZEROA

The Basque Santa Claus

[Click here](#) for the general background information

[Click here](#) for the children's story



In every culture there is a winter celebration figure, a mythical personage around whom the festive revelries of midwinter revolve, the hub of activities around which the clan, the community and the nation identifies in their collective attempt to break the wintry chill of outdoor inactivity and to fill the still, sometimes foreboding silence of snow-clad countryside. Whether this figure is called "Papa Noel," "Santa Claus," or "Olentzero," the motif is the same. He is jolly, rotund, fatherly, the provider, the one who nourishes.

Some customs derived from Christian influence, but others are products of older religions. The pre-Christian era celebrated the end/beginning of a year. Christians moved the celebration of the birth of Christ to this season. There are various ways of saying Christmas in Euskara, including "Gabonak," "Olentzero," and "Natibitate," but the most widespread word is "Eguberria" or "new-day" in Basque. Today we know the Olentzero as the mythic winter figure, but he takes his name from an older custom. The word "olentzero" is the combination of two words--olesen-aroa--which gives us an indication of the figures significance.

The meaning of "aroa" is clear, meaning "time" or "season," but "olesen" is an old Basque word that is preserved only in old folk-songs. We can trace the transformation of the word from olesen-aroa--to--olezen-aroa--to--olentsen-aro--to--olentzen-aroa, and finally, to Olentzero. Olentzero, for earlier Basques, was the season of asking from house to house. This custom is still maintained in some Basque villages as the youth go from house to house, dancing and singing, collecting food or money to prepare a special meal as illustrated here.



On the 24th of December, the Olentzero makes his appearance. His image is conjured up by villagers, sometimes made of paper mache, sometimes even a carved figure. The common assumption is that this character derived from the occupation of a charcoal maker [click on image at left]. His image changes from place to place, but he is characteristically dressed in the traditional "baserri" or peasant farmer's garb of dark pants tucked into socks below the knees; "abarkak" or leather, rope tied shoes; a dark overshirt sometimes with a coat of natural wool; a black beret, staff and a smoking pipe.

He is paraded through the streets, choral groups accompanying him, mostly youthful choristers, dressed in similar costume and bundled up for protection from the chilling wintry winds. The most recent locale of this costumed character is the northern part of Nafarroa. It was in this region that villages kept this tradition alive.

[SOURCES: The Basque Educational Organization of San Francisco and *Orhipean: Gure Herria Ezagutzen* (Iruñea: Lamia, 1992): 81-82.]

### *Hona hemen horietako baten kondaira...*

Jon Aske has translated and secularized the story of the Basque Olentzero, the coal maker who made toys for poor children. Aske's version comes from the children's book *Olentzero: Izena duan guztia omen da* by Angel Benito Gastañaga. He has included the first few words from each page of the original Basque version so that you can follow the





book, if you have it.

~ **Olentzero** ~

. *Betidanako gure basoetan ...*

In the forests of our country, there are many different kinds of creatures that people can't see. They are all part of nature, and people have written many stories and fables about them. When we go through our mountains and our valleys, from a wonderful corner of the imagination they keep us

company and take care of us.

*Hona hemen horietako baten kondaira...*

Here is the story of one of those beings, the story of Olentzero, a humble man who with his love comes into the heart of all creatures, real and imaginary.

*Behin batean ...*

Once upon a time, many, many years ago, in the deep forests of the Basque Country, there lived a very beautiful fairy. Her hair was yellow like the sun and her eyes were very bright.

*Lamia guztiek bezala, ...*

Like all fairies, she looked after the people and she was always accompanied by some little and funny creatures, like goblins, called Prakagorri, or "red-pants" who helped her with her work. *Egun batez, ...*

One day, when she was traveling through the mountains, she stopped to brush her hair next to a fountain. Suddenly, the Prakagorris noticed that something was moving among the ferns.

*Lamia bere ile kizkurra ...*

The fairy kept brushing and brushing her curly hair and didn't notice anything until Prakagorris' shouts caught her attention.

*Gizakume bat da hori.*

"It's a human baby," said the oldest of the goblins.

"Why did they leave it here?" said all the Prakagorris at once.

"I don't know," said the fairy, "it is hard to understand how humans can be so heartless sometimes."

*Gaurtik aurrera, ...*

"From now on," said the fairy to the baby, "your name will be Olentzero, for it is wonderful thing to

have found you. And I hereby give you the gifts of Strength, Courage and Love, for as long as you live." Then the fairy picked up the baby and took him to an old house at the edge of the forest where there lived a man and a woman who had no children.

*Horien bihotza ...*

"They will be very, very happy to receive this child and they will take good care of it, I know" said the fairy, and she left the boy there in front of the door for them.

Very early in the morning, when the sun was just starting to come out, the man came out of the house to go milk the cows. He was very surprised to see the baby, and he called to his wife: "My love, come quickly! Come and see what I've found!"

Just as the fairy had predicted, the man and the woman were very, very happy to find this child. "How could we be so lucky!", said the woman. And immediately they covered the boy with a warm blanket and gave him some food, and they took him as their son.

*Honela mendi zoragarri haietan ...*

And that is how Olentzero came to grow up in those wonderful mountains, until he became a strong, healthy and lovable man. His parents were very happy and Olentzero was not at all worried about the strange way in which his parents had come to find him.

*Goizetik arratseraino ...*

Olentzero worked every day from morning till night, making coal and helping his aging father.

After many years the old couple who had been Olentzero's loving parents finally died and Olentzero was left all alone in the house in the forest.

*Urteak joan, urteak etorri ...*

The years came and went and his face began to wrinkle and his hair began to turn white.

*Bere bihotza goibeltzen ...*

Living alone made him sad and he realized that what he needed to do was to help other people who needed his help. He remembered that in the town there was a house where there lived some children who had no parents. They lived on whatever the people in the town gave them, and he realized that these children were very lonely, just like him, and that he could do things for them to make them happy.

*Olentzero gizon argia zen ...*

Olentzero was very clever and very good at making things with his hands, so he made some toys out of wood for those children: little toys and dolls, which he would take to the children when he went to

town to sell his coal.

*Panpina eta gizontxoak bukatu zituenean ...*

When he finished the dolls and other toys, he put them in a big bag, put the bag on his donkey, and left for the town. He felt very happy inside that day, and his eyes were shining very brightly.

*Goiz guztia eman zuen mendiz mendi ...*

It took him a whole morning of walking through the mountains to get to the town, but he was very happy. He smiled as if in a dream, for he was going to give to the children the toys that he had made.

*Herriko txikiek ...*

The little children in the village were very happy too when they got their presents, and Olentzero spent the afternoon playing with them and telling them stories he had learned from his father when he was little. The boys and girls loved Olentzero very much and after that day they didn't feel as lonely as before. Olentzero became very well known in that town. Whenever he approached, he would quickly be surrounded by children.

*Urte asko, eder eta zoriontsu ...*

This went on for many beautiful and happy years, but one time there was a terrible storm in the town and the mountains around it which destroyed many things. The cold, strong winds and the sound of thunder left the people very scared and upset, especially the children.

*Egun batez, ...*

One day, when Olentzero was coming to town, he saw lightning hit a house. He quickly ran to the house and he saw some children at one of the windows, very scared, screaming and calling for help. Without hesitating he went into the house, which was in flames, covered the children with a blanket to protect them from the fire, and carried them out of the house through a window in the first floor.

*Beretzat irtenbide bat ...*

But while he was trying to get out himself, a big old wooden beam from the ceiling fell on top of him. Olentzero fell down in great pain, and his strong and beautiful heart stopped. The people in the town cried when they saw the house in flames, and what had happened, and realized that there was nothing they could do.

*Une larri hartan ...*

But right then they were all surprised by a bright light shining from inside the burning house. Nobody could see what was happening inside. But inside the house, the fairy who had found Olentzero in the

mountains, when he was a baby so many years ago, appeared next to Olentzero and began calling his name in her sweet voice: "Olentzero! Olentzero!"

*Gizon handia izan zara ..*

She said: "Olentzero, you have been a good man, faithful and kind hearted. You have spent your life doing things for others, and you have even given your own life to save others. So I do not want you to die. I want you to live forever. From now on you will make toys and other presents for children who do not have parents in this town and everywhere in the Basque Country."

*Guk lagundu egingo dizugu!*

"And we will help you!" called out all the Prakagorri, flying around Olentzero.

*Honela, ...*

And that is how it came to pass that, in the middle of every winter, at the end of every year, Olentzero goes to all the towns of Basque Country delivering toys and presents to children who don't have parents and grandparents to give them presents. The children in all the towns celebrate the coming of the Olentzero by singing songs and spreading his message of love, strength and courage.

Some people don't believe that Olentzero really exists. But in Basque there is an old saying: that everything that has a name exists, if we believe it does.

